

# Adventures in Grammar: The Power of Stories

**We all know that stories can stimulate thought, reflection, and learning.  
They can also make grammar instruction more engaging and effective.**

In this webinar, we will:

- discuss ways of dramatizing grammar rules to make them memorable
- examine techniques for helping students discover grammar for themselves as they explore popular stories
- consider how to make students the center of their own grammatical stories as we help them share their own experiences and use new forms to tell their tales



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# Dr. Christopher Stillwell



Christopher has taught English as a Second or Foreign Language in Spain, Japan, and the United States, and he has worked as a teacher educator in such places as Egypt, Peru, and Laos. He has edited two *Language Teaching Insights from Other Fields* books for TESOL International.

Christopher works with teachers and language learners at University of California, Irvine and the College of the Sequoias. In the past year, he has served as a mentor at Teachers College, Columbia University and as a U.S. Department of State English Language Specialist in Brazil.



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# Adventures in Grammar: The Power of Stories



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**URGENT!!!**



Lunarnauts' perfect landing**ARMSTRONG WALKS  
ON THE MOON***When to see  
Apollo on TV*

Recorded pictures of the first steps on the moon will be shown every hour on the hour between 8 a.m. and 10.50 a.m. today on BBC-1. ITV will also show pictures from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. with a progress report on Apollo.

Day's televised moonshot coverage will be:

**BBC-1**

8.30 a.m.: Pictures of moon walk with progress report.  
9.15 p.m.: Report on preparations to leave moon.  
10.00 p.m.: Report of preparations for lift-off from moon.  
10.20-7.05 p.m.: Report on lift-off from moon with "live" pictures.  
8.0 p.m.: Special "Panorama" programme.  
10.25-11.0 p.m.: Special programme "24 Hours" as lunar module joins command module.

**BBC-2**

Forwards: Pictures of moon walk every hour on the hour possible colour pictures command module as it leaves moon.  
1.0-1.50 p.m.: as

**ITV**

12 noon-12.10 p.m.: report on moonwalk.  
Studio report on moonwalk.  
6.0-7.50 p.m.: Report on lift-off from moon with "live" pictures.

**ssians  
news  
ate**

**ANK TAYLOR  
Moscow**

**'One small step for**

The hatch was opened at 3.39 a.m. Armstrong was taking his time getting out. At 3.50 a.m. Armstrong, moving backwards, asked Aldrin: "How am I doing." The answer came back: "You are doing fine." He was out a few minutes later.

At about 3.55 a.m., as the first live pictures came over, Armstrong was seen climbing down backwards. As he explored the ground with his boot, he said: "It is like powdered charcoal. It is fine layers." As he actually stepped on to the moon he said: "One small step for Man."

Armstrong and Aldrin were not due to begin their walk until 7.17 a.m. after several hours' rest, but before midnight they asked permission from Mission Control at Houston to start their walk earlier. Back went the reply:

*Man 'could live on' —P17  
Moon steps learnt by heart —Back Page  
Pictures—P18  
Editorial Comments—P12*

**NEW YORK  
MAKES IT  
A PARTY**

By JOHN MOSKOWITZ  
in New York  
ONE single announcer by the major television networks

**Show  
jumping  
chief  
resigns****Daily Telegraph Reporter**

**MR. PETER ROBESON**, 58, resigned yesterday as manager of the British Show Jumping team which is to compete this week in the Royal International Horse Show at Wembley.

He asked to be relieved of the post following allegations in the News of the World of cruelty to show jumping horses at his farm near Newport Pagnell, Bucks. Mr. Robeson, who captained the British team at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, has denied the allegations.

Mr. Douglas Bunn, 40, chairman of the British Show Jumping Association, said last night he would take over from Mr. Robeson at the International Horse Show, which begins tomorrow.

The decision followed an emergency hour-long meeting of the Association's Committee. After the meeting Mr. Bunn, founder of the famous jumping course at Hickstead, Sussex, attempted to persuade Mr. Robeson to carry on as team manager but had failed.

There was another shock when Mr. Alan Oliver, 37, dismissed from the British team.

**New show manager**

Mr. Oliver withdrew both horses from the European Show Jumping Championship at Hickstead, Surrey, on after a series of jumping disasters. By doing so he eliminated himself from championship.

Of Mr. Oliver's dismissal Mr. Bunn said: "We feel the view of Mr. Oliver's form in the recent two weeks thought it safer to George Hobbs in his place."

Photographs in the News of the World showed a pale Mr. Robeson's farm studding several hundred raised beds. Another picture illustrated to which a number of skins had been wired.

According to the purpose of the de-

**Kennedy may face  
crash summons***By NABEL ELLIOTT in Edgartown, Mass.*

**SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY** is expected to receive a summons today to appear in court for failing to report the accident in which his car plunged into Nantucket Sound, killing a woman passenger, Miss Mary Kopechne.

The eight or so hours between the time his car plunged from a bridge on Chappaquiddick Island and Mr. Kennedy reporting, distraught and shocked, at the police station here has not yet been officially accounted for by police or friends.

The body of Miss Kopechne, 28, the attractive

"diving repeatedly" to try to save the girl.

The events of the next hours

**EGYPTIAN  
AIR DUEL  
'VICTORY'**

**EGYPT** said yesterday that 17 Israeli planes were shot down and a missile unit and two radar stations destroyed in actions along the Suez Canal and Sinai.

Cairo Radio described the action as "the Arabs' greatest victory" since the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. There was little doubt that it was one of the most serious clashes between Egyptian and Israeli forces since the six-day war.

A photograph of a woman and a man sitting on a patterned rug, reading a large open book to two young children. The woman, with long dark hair, is smiling and gesturing with her right hand. The man, with a white beard and a white knit hat, is looking at the book. The children, a boy and a girl, are looking at the book with interest. The scene is warmly lit, suggesting a cozy indoor setting.

## Stories can:

- engage
- teach lessons
- improve communication skills

# Teaching grammar through stories can...

- make rules memorable
- show how we choose forms to match meanings and situations
- lead to independent learning



# Overview: Three Techniques



1. Use students' own stories for grammar development



2. Help students discover grammar in existing stories



3. Bring grammar to life through drama and story

1. Use students' own stories for grammar development

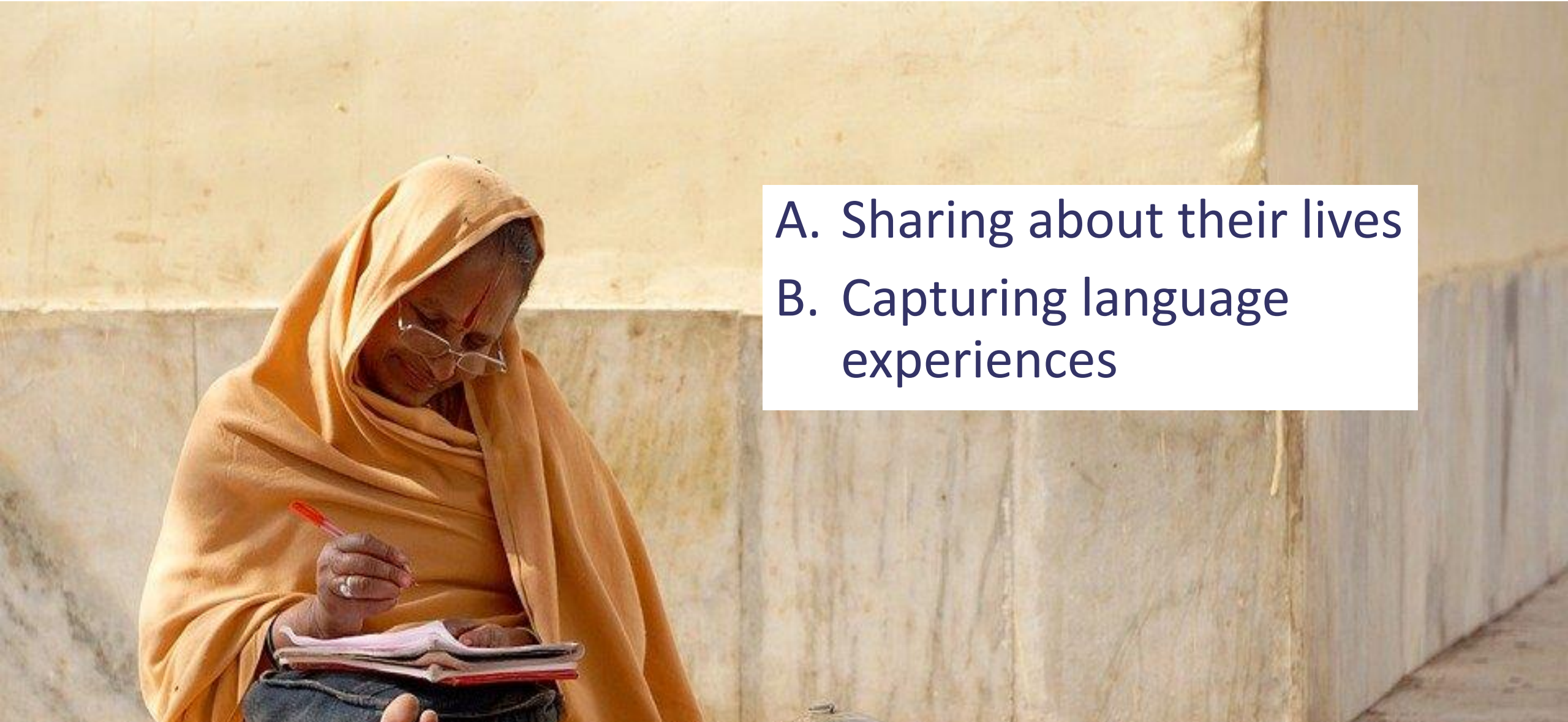




## Why use learners' own stories?

- Student-centered
  - Motivating
  - Personalized
  - Adaptable
- Great characters
- Builds community

# 1. Using Students' Stories



- A. Sharing about their lives
- B. Capturing language experiences

**Q: What  
writing  
prompts do  
you use to get  
students to  
share about  
their life  
experiences?**



# 1A. Sharing about their lives

*Think about the time when  
you heard that our school  
was going to close for  
Coronavirus.  
What were you doing?*

**Challenge:** Try to use past  
progressive in your response



# Respond to meaning

- When I heard about coronavirus I wanted a vaccine. (Joice)
- I was very afraid. (Brenda)
- I thought it's far away. (Rosalia)
- I was working when the pandemic start in my country. (Mariani)
- When I heard about Covid 19 I was shopping so I had to go home. (Safa)

# Call attention to grammar (What are the **simple past** verbs?)

- When I **heard** about coronavirus I **wanted** a vaccine. (Joice)
- I **was** very afraid. (Brenda)
- I **thought** it's far away. (Rosalia)
- I was working when the pandemic start in my country. (Mariani)
- When I **heard** about Covid 19 I was shopping so I **went** home. (Safa)

# Call attention to grammar (What verbs are **past progressive**?)

- When I heard about coronavirus I wanted a vaccine. (Joice)
- I was very afraid. (Brenda)
- I thought it's far away. (Rosalia)
- I **was working** when the pandemic start in my country. (Mariani)
- When I heard about Covid 19 I **was shopping** so I went home. (Safa)

# Call attention to grammar (What **time words** do you see?)

- **When** I heard about coronavirus I wanted a vaccine. (Joice)
- I was very afraid. (Brenda)
- I thought it's far away. (Rosalia)
- I was working **when** the pandemic start in my country. (Mariani)
- **When** I heard about Covid 19 I was shopping so I went home. (Safa)

# Highlight effective choices and ask for changes

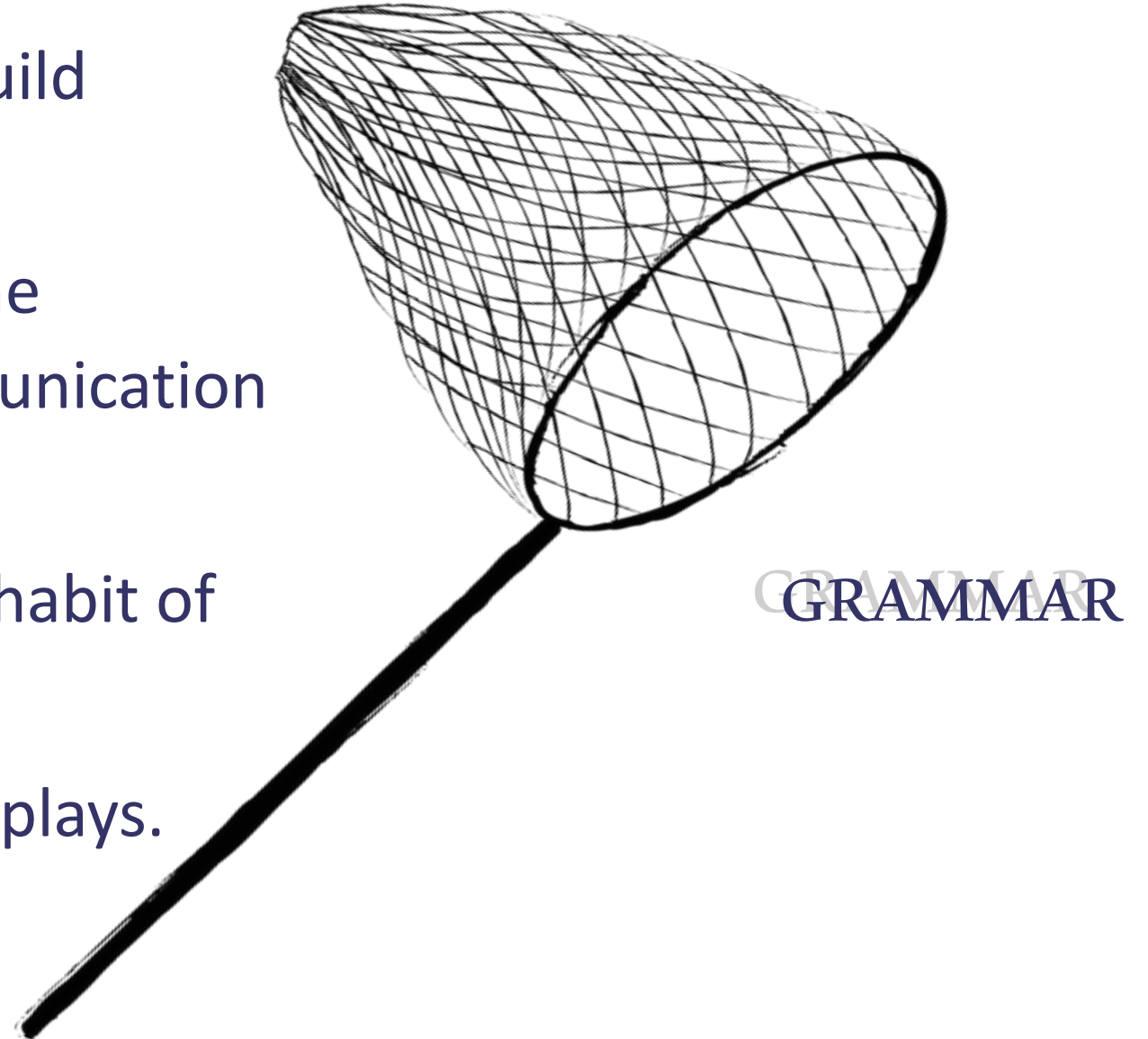
*Write your sentence again or write a new sentence. Try to use:*

- Simple past
- Was/were + -ing verb
- When

- When I heard about coronavirus I wanted a vaccine. (Joice)
- I was very afraid. (Brenda)
- I thought it's far away. (Rosalia)
- I was working when the pandemic start in my country. (Mariani)
- When I heard about Covid 19 I was shopping so I went home. (Safa)

# 1B. Capturing Language Experiences

- As students share stories, they build community.
- Teachers can help them **notice** the grammar that makes their communication effective.
- Next, we can get students in the habit of **noticing** grammar on their own.
- One way to do so is through role plays.



Through **role plays**, students can draw from their own stories and experiences to explore grammar.

Topics may include:

Through **role plays**, students can draw from their own stories and experiences to explore grammar.

Topics may include:

### Giving Advice

A: What should I do?

B: Well, ...



### Requests

A: Can I borrow your car? I need it because...



Through **role plays**, students can draw from their own stories and experiences to explore grammar.

Topics may include:

### Requests and Reasons

A: Can I borrow  
your car? I need  
it because...

B: Well, ...



### Predictin

A: I can see your  
future. Next year,  
you will...



Through **role plays**, students can draw from their own stories and experiences to explore grammar.

Topics may include:

## Predicting the Future

A: I can see your future. Next year, you will...

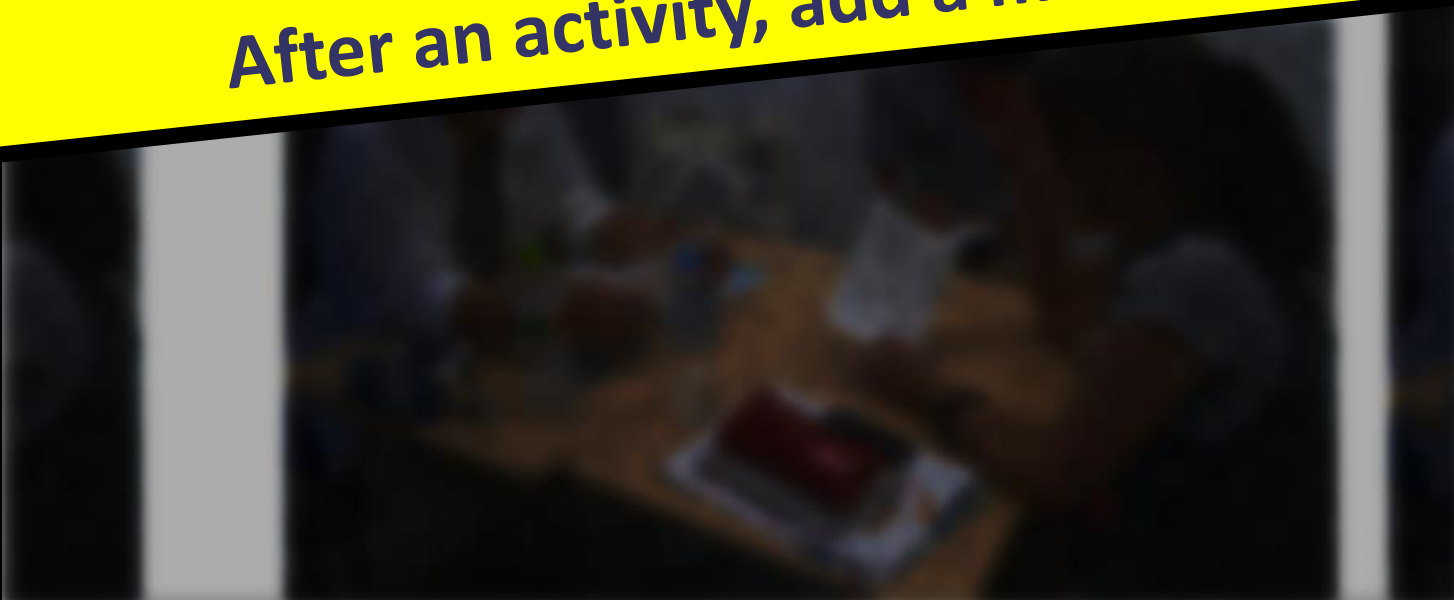
B: Really?  
What else?

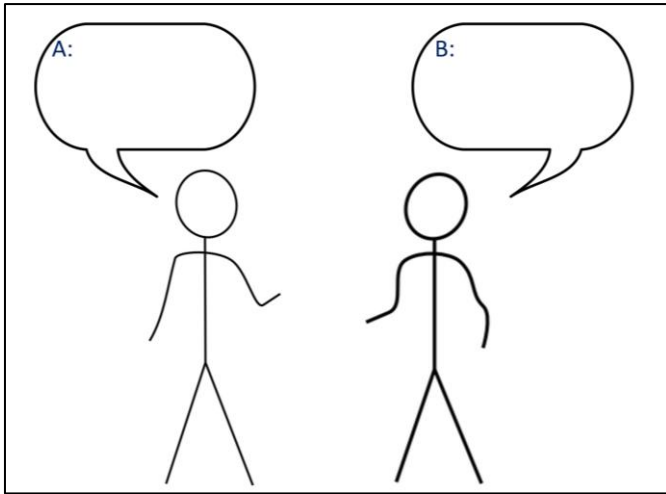
A: ...



## Predicting the Future

**Problem-** Students may finish a role play without using the intended language, or without noticing it. After an activity, add a moment to reflect.





Capture role play  
language by  
collaborating on  
a written  
dialogue

A-

B-

A-

B-

A-

B-




# The Element of Surprise

# Unexpected Experience



# Another Visitor





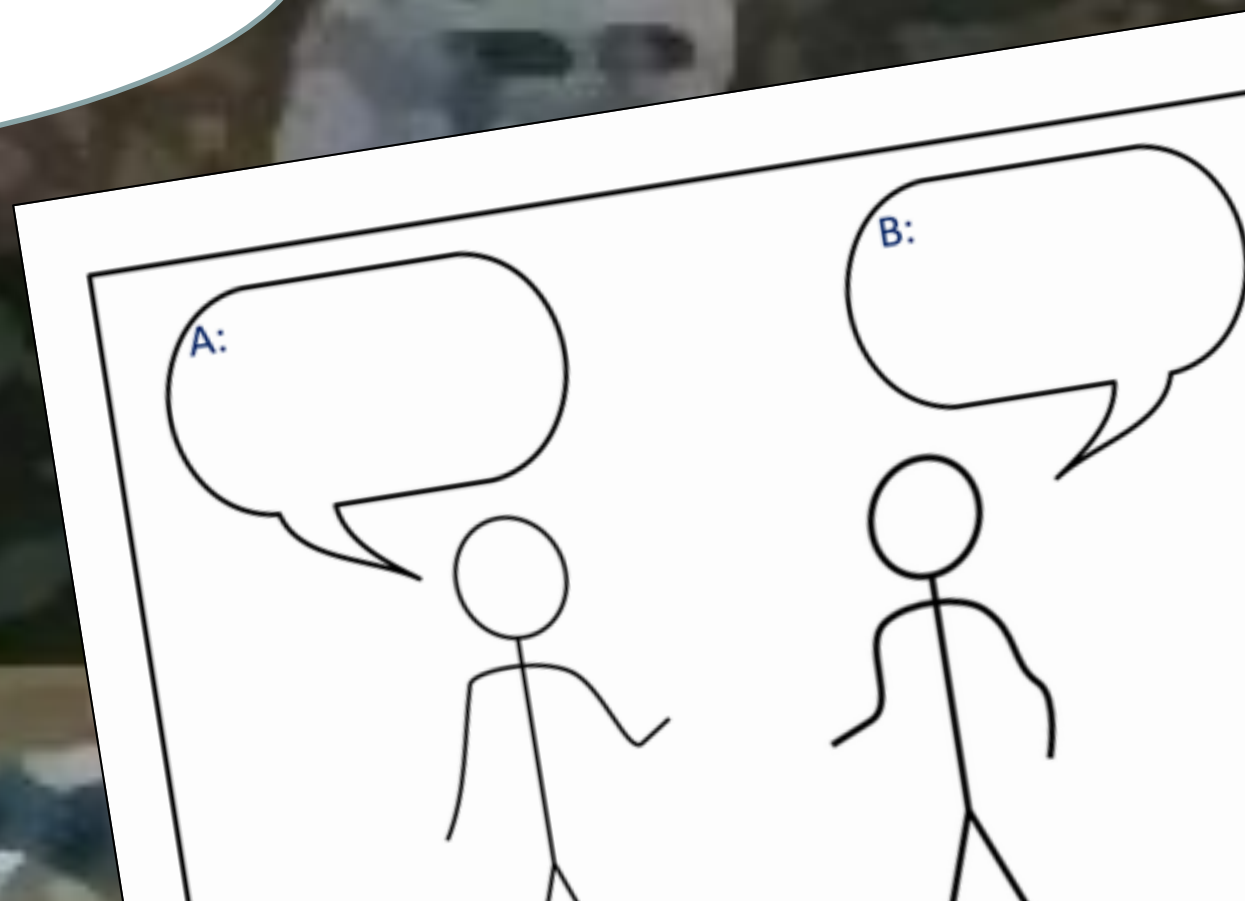
Did Phil interrupt  
your class? What  
did he say?

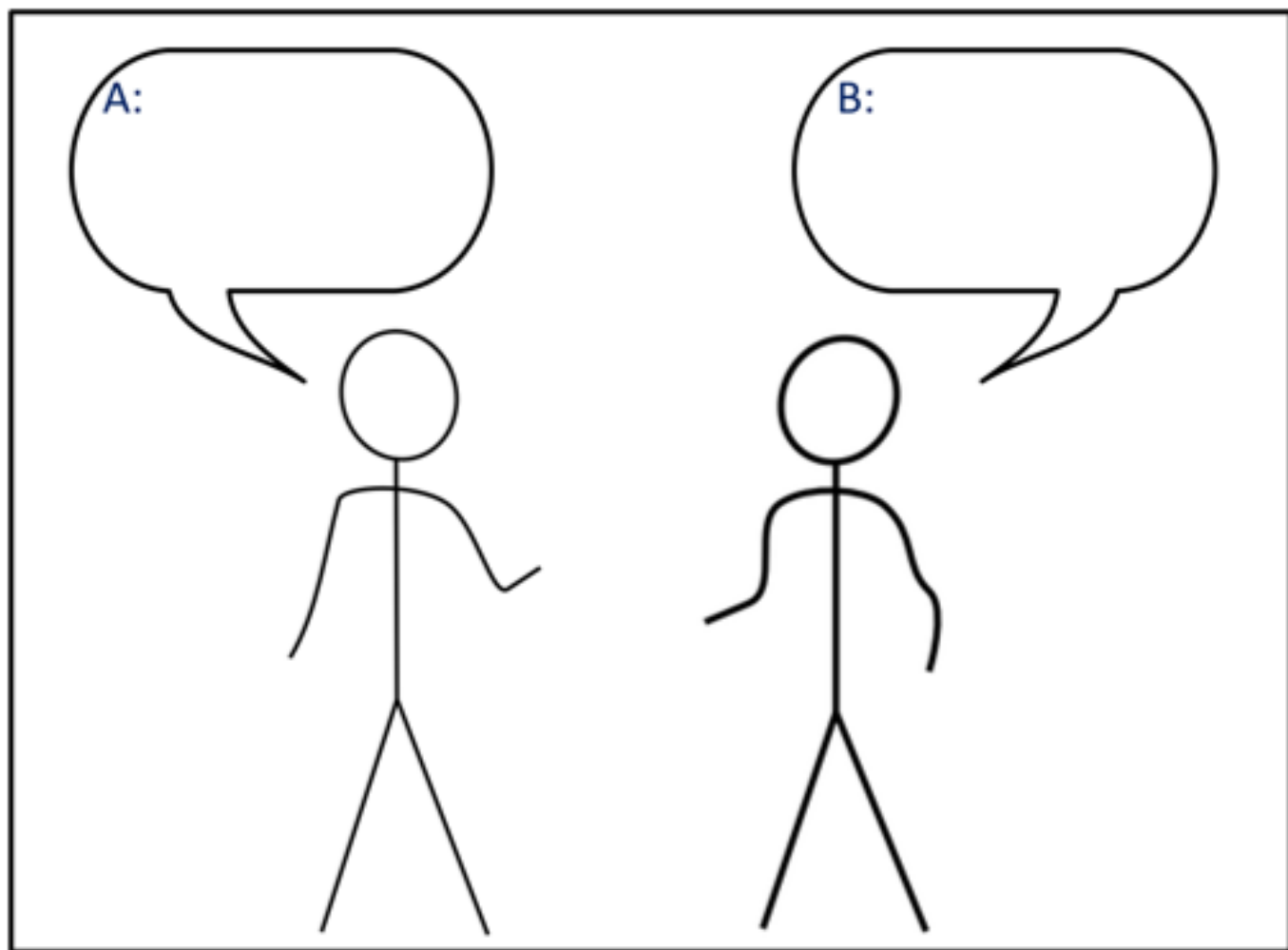
Phil wanted to talk to us.  
Chris said, "We don't  
have time!" but Phil said,  
"I only need a minute."

We will need to tell the director about this.  
Could you please write what happened on a piece of paper?



Maybe you can use the papers  
already on your desk.





A-

B-

A-

B-

A-

B-



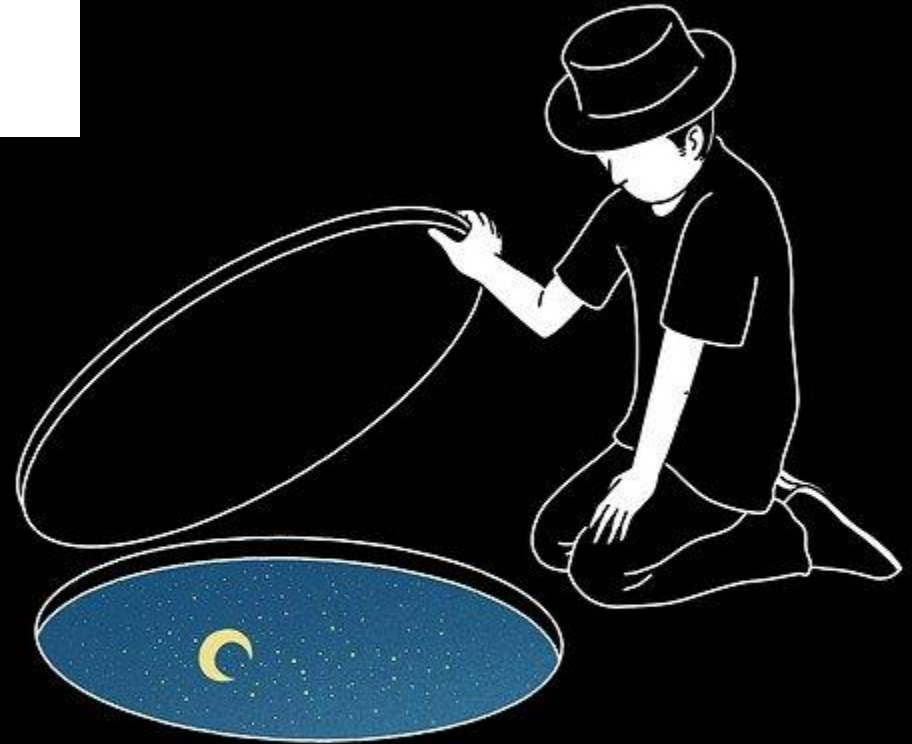
# Other Surprises

Student interruptions

Real announcements from  
visitors

Things heard in assemblies,  
class trips

**Q: Do you ever  
incorporate elements of  
surprise or mystery into  
your class? How?**






## A Habit of Noticing

Invite students to pay attention to language outside of class that interests them or surprises them

Could be part of a routine

- Students share in pairs
- Teacher listens and identifies 1-2 examples to analyze with the class

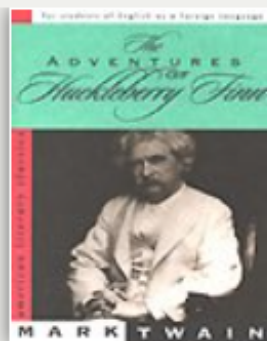
The background of the image is a blurred photograph of a library. It shows rows of bookshelves filled with books, with a warm, slightly out-of-focus light source, possibly a hanging lamp, visible in the upper right area. The overall tone is cozy and intellectual.

Technique 2:  
Help students  
discover  
grammar in  
existing  
stories

A close-up photograph of a person's head and shoulder. The person is cupping their right hand behind their ear, with fingers spread, indicating they are listening intently. The background is a light-colored wall with faint, illegible text.

## In a dictogloss, students:

1. learn about the context and essential vocabulary
2. listen to a short passage (2x), **no writing**
3. write what they remember
4. **share notes and reconstruct** the text
5. look at the original text and compare

<https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/adventures-huckleberry-finn>[Select Language](#) ▼[ABOUT US](#)[RESOURCES AND PROGRAMS](#)[ENGLISH TEACHING FORUM](#)

# The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

*An adaptation of the timeless novel by Mark Twain. Part of the Ladder Series, this volume has approximately 2000 headwords and is appropriate for intermediate to advanced learners.*



Words

Stars

Trees

Shine

Wind



# Step 1: Listen Only



Step 2: Write (in the chat)

**Q: What words and phrases did  
you hear?**

## Step 3: Compare and combine



## **Rosalia, Helen, Mariani**

- The star was shining and the wind was moving the trees. I couldn't understand what the wind saying but so far I heard a different sound. I thought that was ghost sound. I became so sad. I wish I had some company.

## **Brenda, Enrique, Kil-Soo, Joice**

- The star was shining. The wind moving the trees. The air was slowly. I became so sad and frighten but I wish and had some company.

## **Gloria, Maria, Souher**

- The star were shining. The wind was moving the tree. Sound like whispering. I couldn't understand what they say. Far away come to ear the sound and getting sad and afraid but I wished there was someone to talk to me his company.

## **Rosalia, Helen, Mariani**

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## Step 4: Compare with Original

### Rosalia, Helen, Mariani

- The star was shining and the wind was moving the trees. I couldn't understand what the wind saying but so far I heard a different sound. I thought that was ghost sound. I became so sad. I wish I had some company.

### Brenda, Enrique, Kil-Soo, Joice

- The star was shining. The wind moving the trees. The air was slowly. I became so sad and frighten but I wish and had some company.

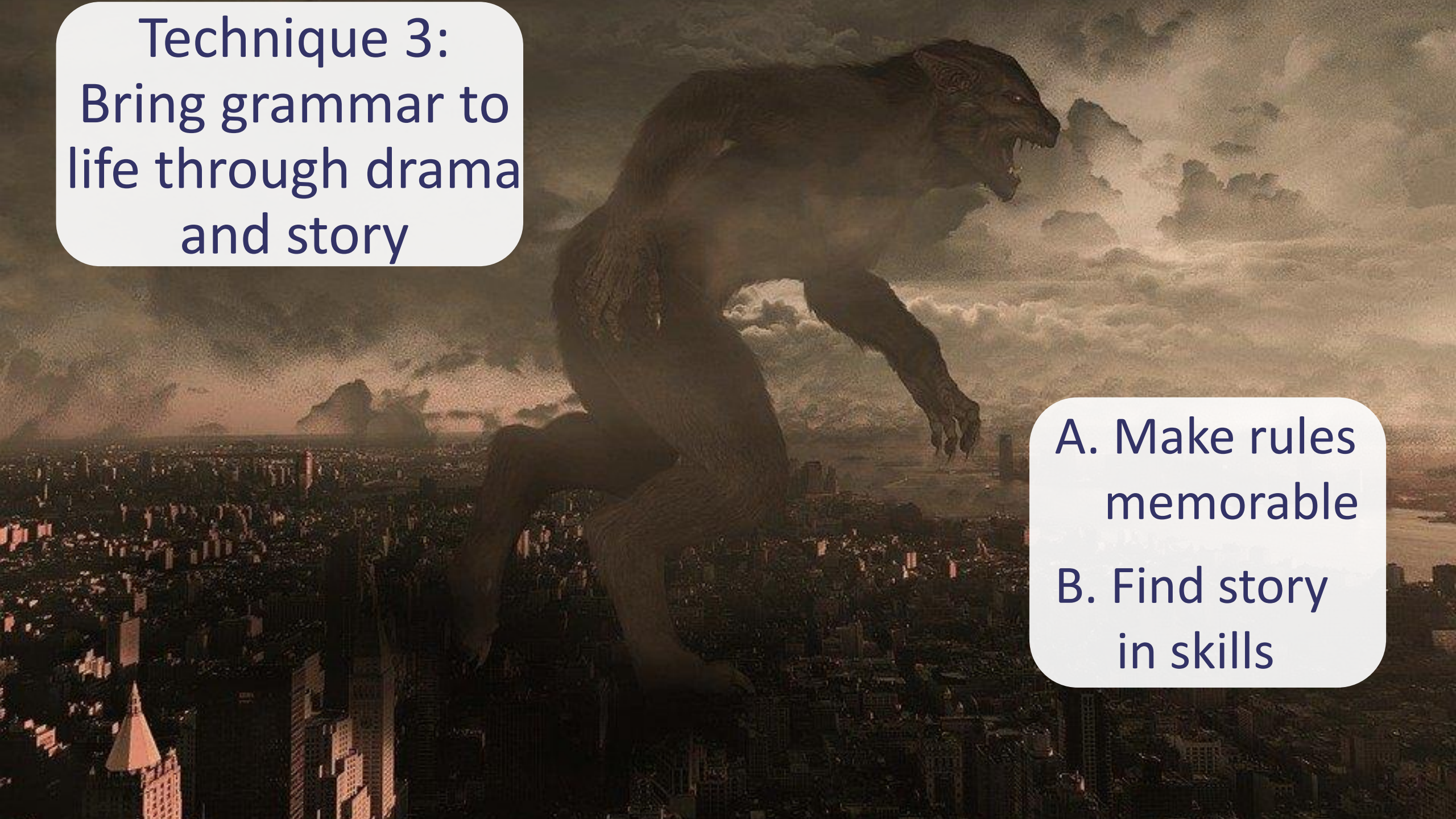
### Gloria, Maria, Souher

- The stars were shining. The wind was moving the tree. Sound like whispering. I couldn't understand what they say. Far away come to ear the sound and getting sad and afraid but I wished there was someone to talk to me his company.

The stars were shining, and the wind moving the trees sounded as though it was whispering to me. I couldn't understand what the wind was saying. Far away in the trees I heard the kind of sound that a ghost makes. I became so sad and frightened that I wished that I had some company.

-Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,  
p. 3 of Ladder Series version

<https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/adventures-huckleberry-finn>

A dramatic scene featuring a massive, dark, bipedal monster with a long tail and sharp claws, standing amidst a city skyline at sunset. The monster is positioned in the center, with its head turned towards the right, mouth open in a roar. The city below is densely packed with buildings, and the sky is filled with large, billowing clouds illuminated by the warm light of the setting sun. The overall tone is epic and cinematic.

Technique 3:  
Bring grammar to  
life through drama  
and story

- A. Make rules  
memorable
- B. Find story  
in skills



## 3A. Making Rules Memorable

- Students often repeat the same mistakes in their writing.
- How to help them remember the rules and avoid frustration?
- Make editing less serious and more memorable through story.

# Frame editing as a battle against common enemies that cause common mistakes

The key: Learn and be vigilant

## WANTED



**Miss Spel**

## WANTED



**Time Killer**

- Define characteristics
- Assign names
- Use real examples
- Develop strategies
- Keep track

## WANTED



**Preposition X**

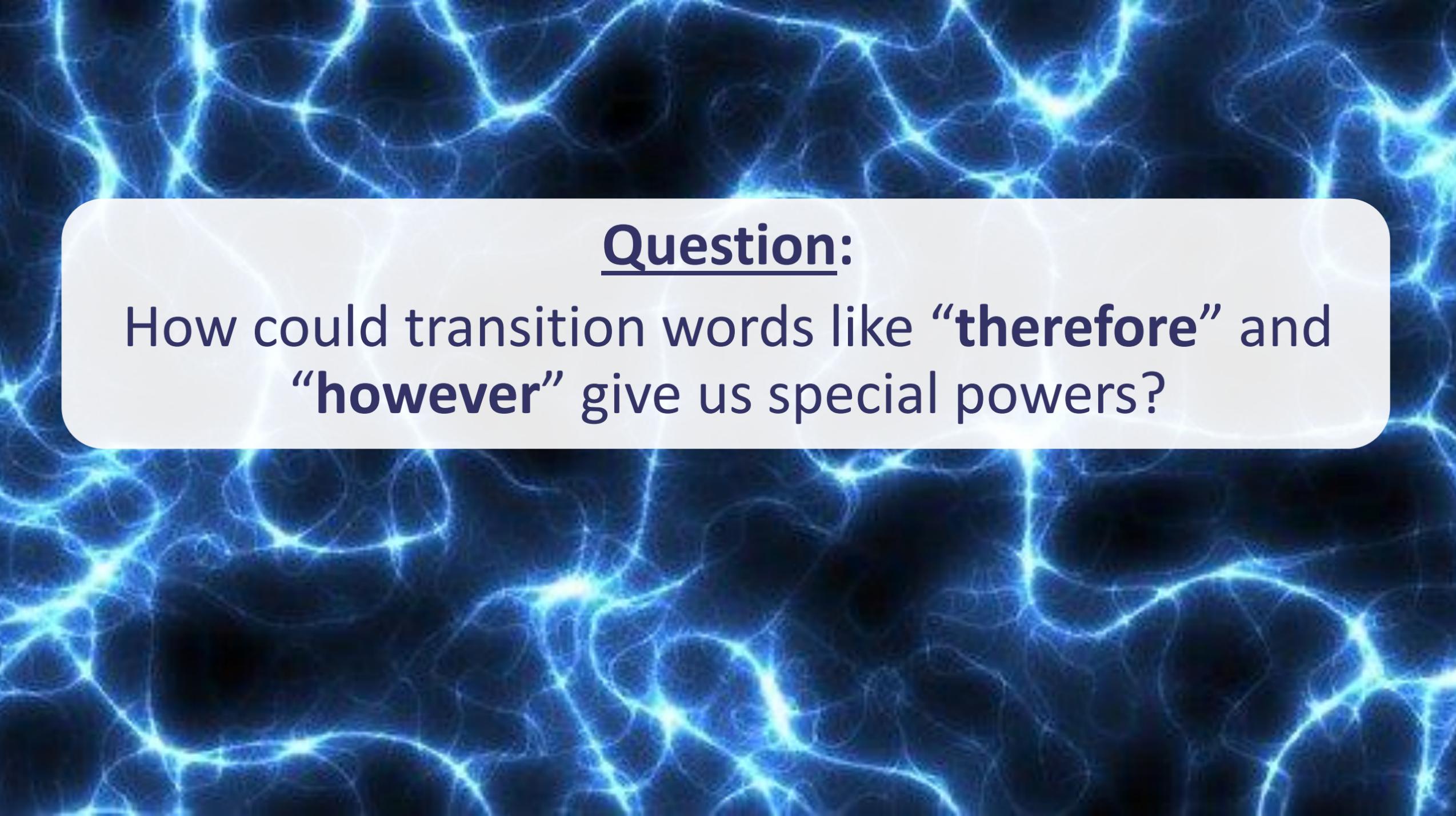
# Keeping Track of ~~Mistakes~~

## Criminals of Communication

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <u>X</u>      | <b><i>The Articler</i></b> - did you check for articles?   |
| <u>      </u> | <b><i>Time Killer</i></b> - were your verb tenses okay?  |
| <u>  ?</u>    | <b><i>Preposition X</i></b> - are your prepositions correct?   |
| <u>XX</u>     | <b><i>Miss Spel</i></b> - how is your spelling?  |
| <u>XXX</u>    | <b><i>S-Napper</i></b> - do you have all your Ss for your<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> person verbs and plurals? |



Grammar rules can give students the ability  
to do something special.



Question:

How could transition words like “**therefore**” and “**however**” give us special powers?

## Transition Words Superpower

### **The power to see the future:**

We should study for the test. Otherwise...

### **The power to see through walls:**

I thought my neighbors would enjoy my loud music.

However,



### **The power to understand strange tongues:**

Miss Evernice told Sir Antigood not to tell anyone her secret.

Nonetheless, *gobbledy gook degoo*.

3B.  
Finding  
the story  
in the  
skills





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HELP YOU  
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EVER VIGILANT, EVER TRUE.  
IF WE DON'T  
HAVE IT,  
A SUPERHERO  
DOESN'T  
NEED IT.  
WE CAN  
HELP YOU  
— ALSO —  
WE CAN  
HELP YOU  
— ALSO —

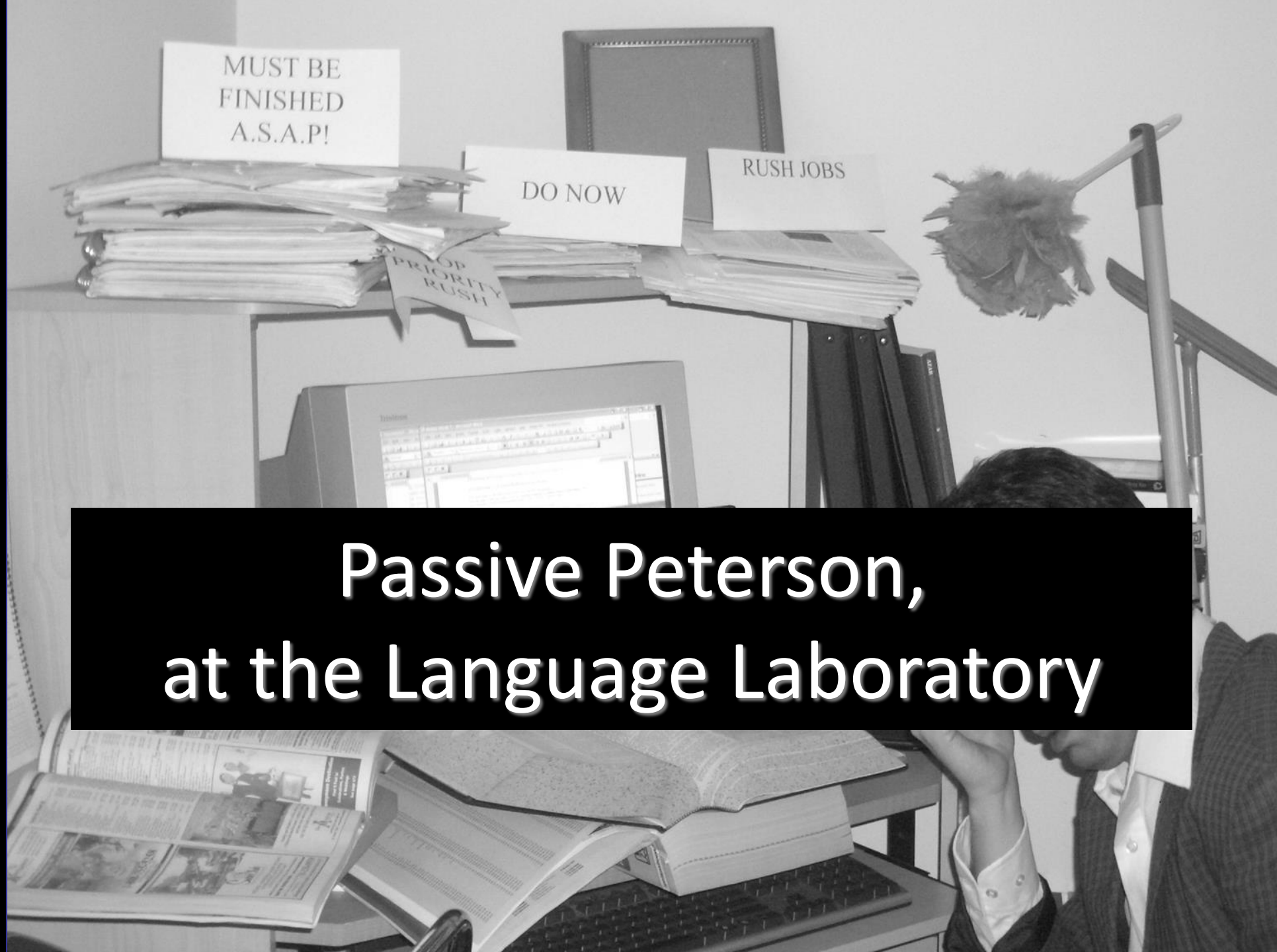
OUR PRODUCTS ARE THESE:

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| ALL-STAR<br>SUPERHERO<br>EQUIPMENT<br>WE CAN<br>HELP YOU<br>— ALSO —<br>WE CAN<br>HELP YOU<br>— ALSO — | ALL-STAR<br>SUPERHERO<br>EQUIPMENT<br>WE CAN<br>HELP YOU<br>— ALSO —<br>WE CAN<br>HELP YOU<br>— ALSO — | ALL-STAR<br>SUPERHERO<br>EQUIPMENT<br>WE CAN<br>HELP YOU<br>— ALSO —<br>WE CAN<br>HELP YOU<br>— ALSO — | ALL-STAR<br>SUPERHERO<br>EQUIPMENT<br>WE CAN<br>HELP YOU<br>— ALSO —<br>WE CAN<br>HELP YOU<br>— ALSO — |
|--|--|--|--|

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# Super Language League





# Passive Peterson, at the Language Laboratory

MUST BE  
FINISHED  
A.S.A.P!

Passive Peterson  
was given a  
lot of work to do.

TOP  
PRIORITY  
RUSH

OW



Passive Peterson was delayed  
by many other projects.

DO NOW

RUSH JOBS

TOP  
PRIORITY  
RUSH



Passive Peterson was fired.



# ATTENTION

Dr. Engl!sh-

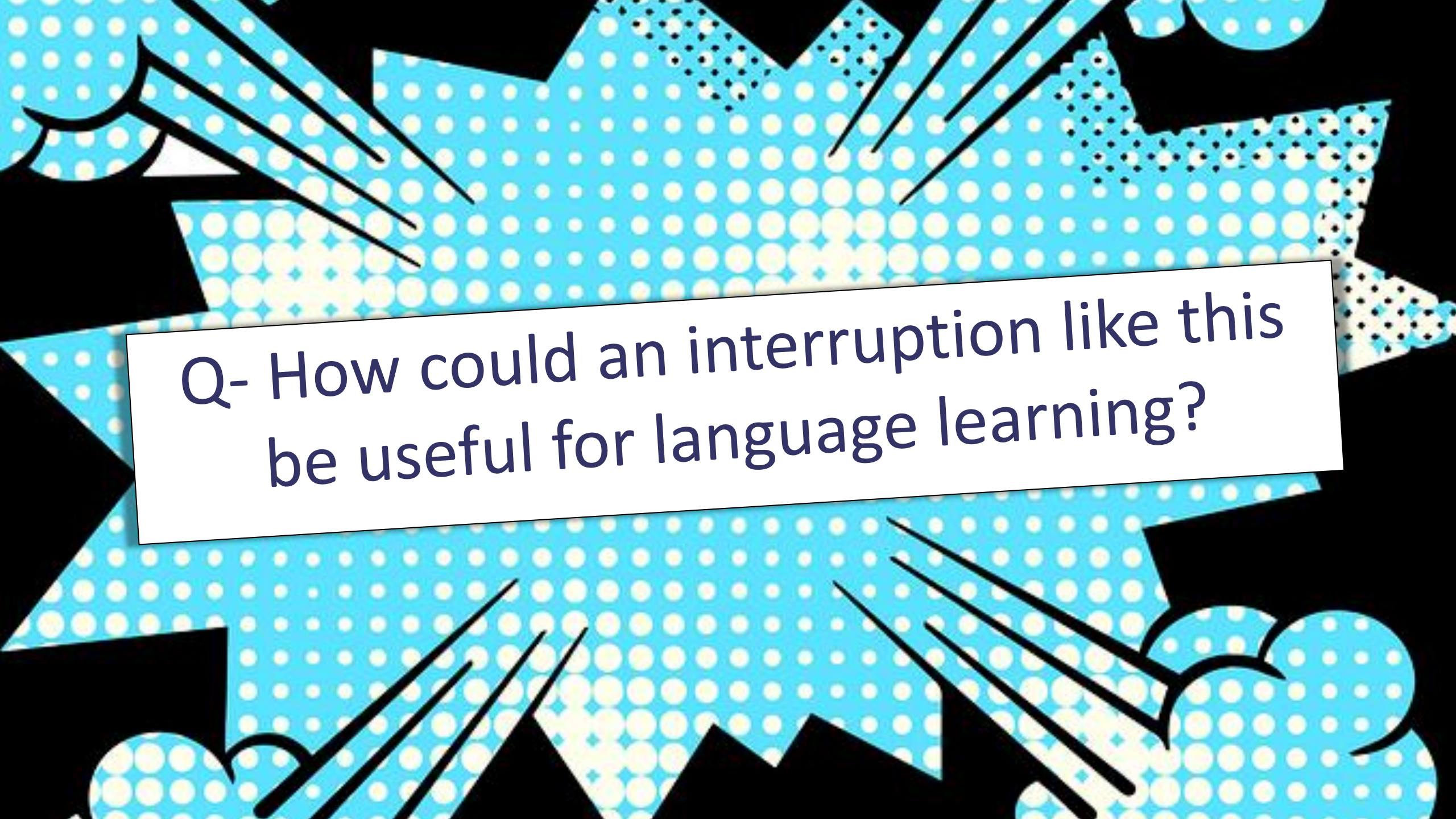
Active-Man is trying to contact you.

He is in trouble. His coworker, Passive Peterson, is also in trouble.

Turn on your super-communicator NOW!







Q- How could an interruption like this  
be useful for language learning?

Bring grammar to  
life through drama  
and story



## The Element of Surprise

### Compare with the Original

Rosalía, Helen, Mariani

- The ~~star~~ was shining and the wind was moving the trees. I couldn't understand what the ~~wind~~ saying but so far I heard a different sound. I thought that was ghost sound. I ~~wish~~ I had some company.

Brenda, Enrique, Kil-Soo, Joice

- The ~~star~~ was shining. The wind moving the trees. The air was slowly. I became so sad and frighten but I ~~wish~~ and had some company.

Gloria, Maria, Souher

- The ~~stars~~ were shining. The wind was moving the tree. Sound like ~~whispering~~. I couldn't understand what they say. Far away come to ear the sound and ~~hearing~~ and afraid but I ~~wished~~ there was someone to talk to me his company.

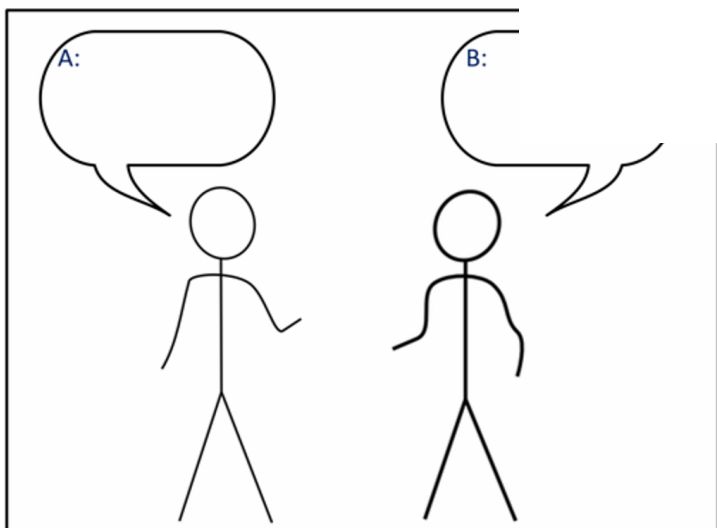
The stars were shining, and the wind moving the trees sounded as though it was whispering to me. I couldn't understand what the wind was saying. Far away in the trees I heard the kind of sound that a ghost makes. I became so sad and frightened that I wished that I had some company.

-Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,  
p. 3 of Ladder Series version

<https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/adventures-huckleberry-finn>

Capt

re and Combine



B-  
A-  
B-  
A-  
B-



Passive Peterson **was visited** by a strange man.





**He was brought outside.**

And then...



And then... he was hit on the head.





After that he **was put** into the back of a car,  
and he **was taken** away.

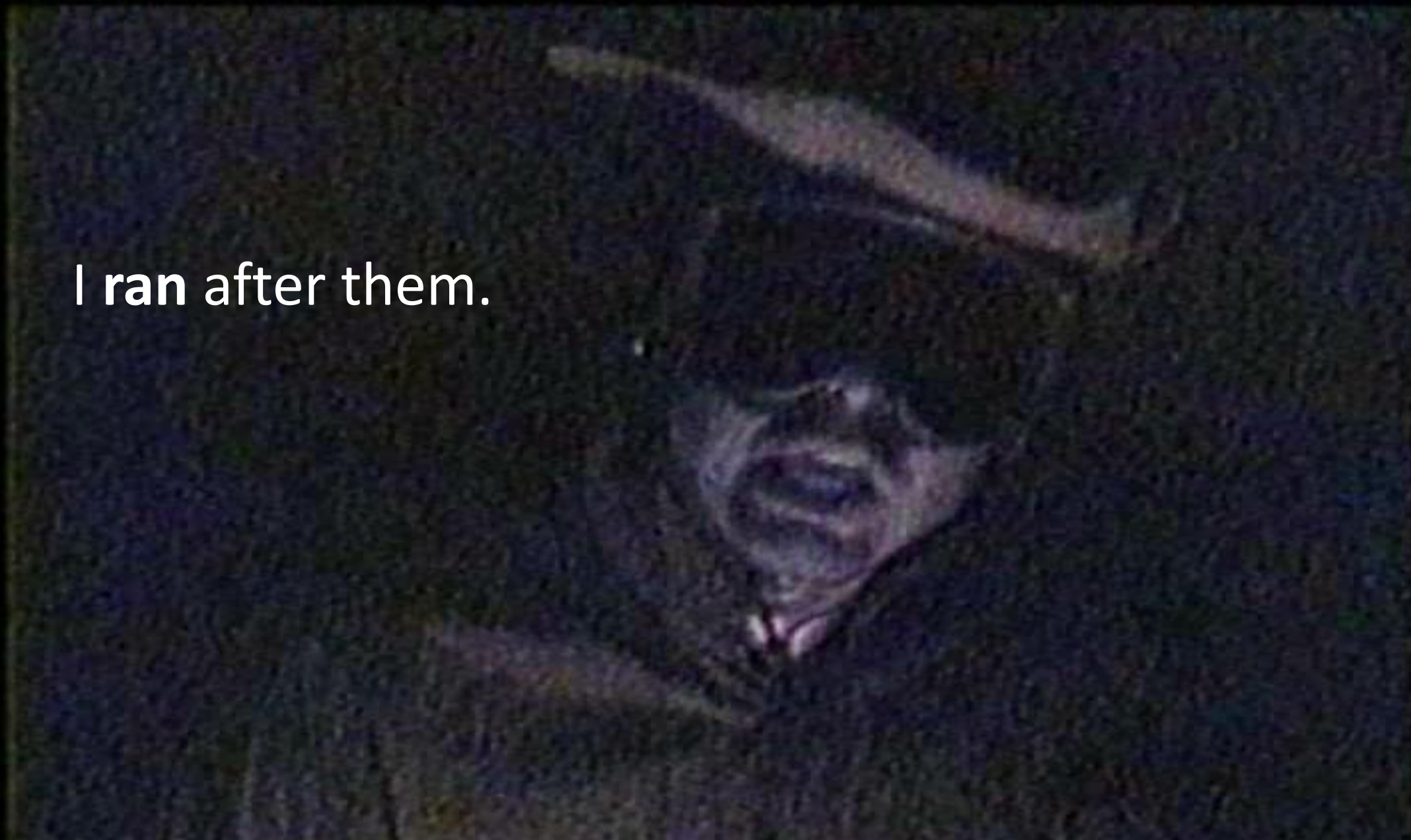
# Active-Man



I followed them.




I ran after them.





I tried to  
rescue  
Passive  
Peterson.



I **found** this television equipment, and  
I **contacted** you.

Note: Surprises don't have to be  
super-dramatic



Student interruptions  
Real announcements from  
visitors  
Things heard in assemblies,  
class trips

A photograph of a wooden bookshelf filled with books. In the center, there is a large, rectangular opening in the shelf. Through this opening, a bright, golden-yellow sky with large, fluffy white clouds is visible. Several small black birds are seen flying in the sky. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, creating a magical and ethereal atmosphere. The books on the shelves are of various colors and sizes, some with visible spines.

# Variety

- We all learn in different ways
- Sometimes routines get boring
- Variety makes lessons memorable through another kind of surprise
  - Example: Using a new way to explore stories and language

Life is Lived Twice:  
Once as experience...



Life is Lived Twice:  
Once as experience...



and a second time as story.



# Three Techniques



1. Use students' own stories for grammar development



2. Help students discover grammar in existing stories



3. Bring grammar to life through drama and story

When we show students how to have adventures with language, we create learning experiences that students will be happy to revisit and remember.



# Adventures in Grammar: The Power of Stories



**Thank you!**

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# Thank you!

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# Thanks for joining us!

**The next AE Live session is on June 30th.  
We hope to see you then.**

**Questions or comments?**

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# Reflection Questions

1. How can you help your students notice grammar in existing stories? What strategies have worked well for you in the past?
2. What are some of the ways you can use elements of surprise in your classroom? Do you already incorporate these into your grammar instruction? If so, how?
3. Have you used drama or created characters to help teach grammar in the past? If so, how did your students respond? Are there any grammar points you could use this technique for in the future to help make the rules more memorable?



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